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AUTHOR Goodlad, John I.
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ABSTRACT

Schools need to be improved holistically, becoming vigorous community institutions. It is the local school which must be the focus of the efforts of community action and parent and teacher support. There are several major problems which many schools must solve in their effort to improve the educational delivery systems in the 1980s. There need to be, outside of schools, various centers giving full-time attention to curriculum development. Several alternative approaches to curriculum development need to be employed simultaneously. The inequities which result in the erosion of the common school are sharply apparent in the differences in subject matter between upper and lower tracks of high school classes, and between vocational and academic programs of study. The range of activities used by teachers to motivate, involve, and stimulate students is limited at all levels of schooling. Few teacher education programs consistently produce graduates capable of handling the complexity that they confront in the classroom. (JN)

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IMPROVING ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE 1980's

John I. Goodlad

University of California, Los Angeles
and
Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc.

The central message in what follows is that schools must improve holistically, largely through local effort, becoming in the process vigorous community institutions. It is the local school that must be the locus of reconstruction. The energies of principals, teachers, students, and parents must be mobilized and supported, school by school. There are no panaceas for such a task.

The problems and difficulties involved will vary from school to school. But several are sufficiently widespread to become or affect the agendas for improvement in many schools. I have chosen four:

1. Fragmented, non-cumulative curriculum planning. This fragmentation begins at the state level and is exacerbated by federal funding policies. It becomes glaringly apparent at the level of the local school.

2. The erosion of the common school, with accompanying severe inequities in access to and acquisition of knowledge. These inequities become sharply apparent in the differences in subject matter between upper and lower tracks of high school subjects and between vocational and academic programs of study.

3. Limited, rote teaching practices in many classrooms. Too often, students are tracked into different subject matter instead of involved in alternative ways to learn subject matter.

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4. Serious shortcomings in both pre-service and in-service education of teachers and administrators. Failure to provide teachers with an adequate, beginning, professional floor creates at the outset a "minor" profession which subsequently can be upgraded only with difficulty and great human and financial cost.

In addressing these problems, I refer from time to time to A Study of Schooling. This is an in-depth analysis of what goes on in a representative sample of schools. A comprehensive report on findings and interpretations will appear in 1981.[1]

Curriculum Development

For a variety of reasons, the curriculum reform movement which flourished for nearly a decade following Sputnik (1957) slowed and virtually stopped in the second half of the 1960's. No segment of the educational system has moved into the vacuum caused by the disappearance or erosion of the curriculum projects once handsomely supported by several agencies of the federal government and private foundations. Curriculum building has not been, for a decade, and is not now the site of creative activity.

This neglect is compounded by the apparent weakness of the local school as a curriculum planning unit. It is the rare school faculty that engages continuously in curriculum development: assuring that the school's program provide in a balanced way for the four broad educational goals which

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[1]The Study has been funded at various times by 10 philanthropic foundations, the National Institute of Education and the United States Office of Education. It is administered by the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., and directed by John I. Goodlad. Some very preliminary findings are reported in the Phi Delta Kappan, Volume 61, Numbers 3, 4, 5, and 6 (November, 1979, through February, 1980).

have emerged in this country over a period of three hundred years;[2] discarding outworn topics and replacing them with new ones; selecting the best materials available; and so on.

Two areas of critical need begin to take shape. First, there need to be, outside of schools, various centers giving full-time attention to curriculum development. It probably is desirable to employ several alternative approaches simultaneously. An obvious one is to create centers in the subject fields comparable to those that flourished more than a decade ago. But it may be preferable--and probably would be less costly--to use existing institutions (e.g., universities) and combinations of institutions (e.g., universities in collaboration with consortia of schools). The education service centers (such as those in Texas and Washington), cutting across several independent school districts, have the potential for the work required and the capability to draw upon both school and university personnel.

However, even an array of dynamic curriculum centers--whether national, regional or relatively local in scope--is not sufficient to assure sound curricular options for children and youth in each school. Unfortunately, the local school is a relatively weak curricular decision-making unit.[3] Nonetheless, it is in the finite dimensions of time and place represented by the individual school that all of the fragmented curriculum development proceeding elsewhere on a broken front must come together and be both symmetrical and comprehensible to those who teach and experience it.

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[2]See John I. Goodlad, What Schools Are For. Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1979.

[3]Gary A. Griffin, "Levels of Curricular Decision-Making," in John I. Goodlad and Associates, Curriculum Inquiry: The Study of Curriculum Practice. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979.

For this sensible state of affairs to occur, there must be a school-based planning process in which all those connected with the school are in various ways involved. The teachers are the professionals in this process. On their general adequacy for this work I shall have more to say later. The principal is the responsible leader, by position if not appropriate preparation.

The essential ingredient is time. Currently, there is not enough of it. Teachers begin their work year shortly before the students do and end it a few days after the instructional term comes to a close. There is no time at the beginning or end of the school year or during it for the kind of sustained planning implied. Teachers are hard-pressed as it is to find planning time for the hours they teach each day. Most principals are employed for eleven months each year but there is little curriculum planning they can do apart from teachers.

The obvious solution is a costly one: cadres of teachers must be employed for additional days each year to assure that a viable program of instruction always will be in place. Their work must be school-specific with support from the district office. And this additional time must be devoted exclusively to the school's curriculum and not teachers' own lesson plans. The principal must be the overall coordinator of the process.

The cautioning question is whether or not principals and teachers are up to it. However, even if many are not--yet--there is no good alternative to placing responsibility for determining the curricular dimensions of the individual school squarely on those who staff it, with

appropriate participation by other responsible parties, including parents. Shifting authority and responsibility to more remote levels, such as the state capitol, is only to assure less relevant decisions and to delay the process of developing teachers and principals capable of the planning required. State authority must articulate broad goals, assure certain quality controls, and provide basic resources. It must not mandate the specific configurations of local school curricula.

Access to Basic Knowledge and Skills

One of the basic requirements of a democracy is that knowledge be humanized and democratized--that is, made understandable and available to the people. It is recognized that people differ widely in their desire and readiness for learning. But desire and readiness are themselves educable traits. Further, lack of desire or readiness today are not fully predictive of later lack. Consequently, we set out in this country to create an educational system equally available to all--at least, that has been the rhetoric.

We know that this principle of equity has been less than adequately fulfilled in the past. With most children and youth up to the ages of 17 or 18 enrolled today in schools, we are too prone to assume that access to basic knowledge and schools is almost universal. There is ample evidence to the contrary. The common practice of tracking students into separate sections of presumably similar subject matter often is defended as a way of recognizing differences in rates of learning. But in the 13 secondary schools examined in the Study of Schooling, the practice appears to result, frequently, in differentiating not only learning rates but what students study. The range in

content between some tracks in, for example, the social studies is so great that students appear to be in different subjects. Students in lower tracks are unlikely to be exposed later to what students of approximately the same grade are being exposed to now.

We know that persons exposed in common to similar learning situations have very different learning experiences. The richer the situation, the more varied and richer the meanings derived are likely to be. But do we really want large numbers of students to be segregated into situations that differ markedly in the very content from which meanings are to be derived? Families provide enormous diversity in the knowledge, skills and values derived by the young. Is there not something to be said, then, for a school that seeks to do something in common with this diversity?

Another, perhaps more invidious separation, is between academic and vocational concentrations. Many academically-oriented students elect to take some vocational courses but not to the degree that these jeopardize college preparatory programs. But it is clear that many students are so heavily into vocational subjects that transferring after the sophomore year into a predominantly academic program would be exceedingly difficult.

It often is argued that these "non-academic" students are being prepared for jobs and that this represents a commendable, traditional role for schools. But for what jobs? And is this the kind of training prospective employers should be providing anyway? Perhaps too many of our young are allowed--indeed, encouraged--to opt out of general education long before they have acquired the knowledge and understanding they need for effective citizenship and vocational mobility.

It is not enough, then, to create in the local school comprehensive curricula designed to promote academic, vocational, social, and personal goals, important though this task is. In addition, schools need to assure common access to this comprehensiveness, not deny it by early tracking into different subject matter or early preparation for job placement. Often, in the name of individual differences, we give up too soon on too many individuals.

Increasing the commonness of the common school is a major agenda item for the 1980's. Forces now at work (such as the drive in some states for so-called voucher plans) could turn the tide even more strongly away from the common, public school. Unfortunately, there appears to be a low level of local awareness that the common school is in jeopardy. Rarely do school personnel keep and examine data designed to reveal the patterns of courses in which individual students enroll and the content of these courses. Few instruments for such purposes are available. Evaluation efforts concentrate almost exclusively on outcome, achievement measures, not the substance or content of the learning situation.

I recommend the development of such data banks by all schools--data banks designed to reveal the content of all courses offered, the spread of enrollments across courses, and the course patterns of individual students.[4] These data undoubtedly would suggest to principals, teachers, students, and parents, as well as policy makers, sorely needed improvements in both school programs and the guidance of students into

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[4]Instruments developed initially for the research conducted in the Study of Schooling referred to earlier could be revised rather readily for such purposes.

them. There is much yet to be accomplished in the humanization and democratization of knowledge through our system of public schooling.

The Improvement of Teaching

Greater equity regarding access to knowledge requires maximal effort to transmit knowledge. Individuals differ in their readiness to acquire knowledge and skills and in their modes and rates of acquisition. Sound pedagogy assumes such differences. Excellent teachers are challenged by the complex task of motivating and guiding the learning of classroom groups characterized by this diversity. They know that the range of differences remains great, no matter how great the effort to secure homogeneous groups through tracking or other organizational methods.

It is somewhat disconcerting, then, to observe the rather limited array of pedagogical procedures employed by many teachers at all levels of schooling. The range of activities employed to motivate and involve students--from the customary techniques of telling and questioning to "hands-on" procedures such as construction, dance, field trips and use of specimens--appears greatest in the kindergarten.[5] It declines markedly in the upper elementary school years and remains narrow subsequently.

There are subject-to-subject differences, however. There is more use of hands, movement, small group activitiy, and individually chosen projects in the arts, physical education and vocational subjects than in subjects usually thought of as academic. There is more use of lecturing, questioning, telling, textbooks and workbooks in the academic subjects--

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[5]John I. Goodlad, M. Frances Klein and Associates. Looking Behind the Classroom Door. Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1974

although, admittedly, these are the hallmarks of pedagogical practice in all subjects.

Perhaps these differences are quite appropriate, paralleling distinctive differences in the nature of school subjects. But one cannot help wondering if these differences in teaching partly explain students' expressed liking of school subjects. Among the students in the sample for the Study of Schooling, the arts came out consistently at the top of students' choices, followed by vocational/career education and physical education. Not only are these the subjects most consistently characterized by teaching methods in addition to conventional classroom procedures, but they also are the ones for which students report the greatest personal role in decision-making.

Further data from the Study reveal that students' self-concepts as related to school programs tend to drop off as they advance through the grades, as does their parents' satisfaction with school programs. Meanwhile, rather traditional didactics and passive learning appear to increase with progression upward in grade. It will be recalled that tracking was characteristic of the high schools in the sample.

One begins to wonder if many schools have adopted organizational procedures over pedagogical ones in seeking to deal with heterogeneous student populations. Instead of creatively trying to teach things in common to diverse groups, teachers may be assuming that differences among students already have been taken care of by various kinds of tracking. It becomes less necessary to be creative in seeking to reach all members of a class when it is assumed that the range of individual differences has been reduced.

My personal impression is that many teachers, for whatever reason, simply do not go far beyond the conventions of lecturing, questioning, textbooks, and workbooks in their daily pedagogical procedures. Perhaps they do not share Bruner's inspiring thesis that ". . . any subject can be taught in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development."[6] Perhaps their lack of success in reaching students who learn less rapidly causes them to doubt the mastery learning Bloom believes necessary and possible--when favorable conditions for learning are created.[7] Perhaps they lack the level of preparation that professional teaching requires.

If we are, through schools, to humanize and democratize knowledge so that it is understandable and available to large numbers of our people--and we must--the pedagogical understandings and skills of beginning and practicing teachers must be vastly upgraded. If this educational goal is to be achieved in this century, a quantum leap in the pre-service and in-service education of teachers is required.

Teacher Education

We are coming to understand that successful teachers orchestrate an array of factors: aptitude, ability, perseverance, and the like residing in individual students; concepts and methods of inquiry inherent in the subject fields; the present attainments of instructional groups; pedagogical procedures designed to motivate and sustain students'

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[6]Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960, p. 33.

[7]Benjamin S. Bloom, Human Characteristics and School Learning. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

learning; and so on. Few, if any, teacher education programs consistently produce graduates capable of handling the complexity they confront in the classroom. Keeping a semblance of order and employing a small repertoire of mechanistic teaching skills constitute the level attained by far too many teachers.

At least two dominant assumptions conspire to make teaching one of the minor professions. First, it is widely assumed that there is no special, substantial body of knowledge and skills to be acquired; and little or no professional lore; and that a college degree is sufficient preparation. A scattering of courses in psychology and teaching, together with a few weeks of practice in schools, are assumed to be helpful but not necessary.

The second assumption is that whatever special knowledge and skills may be necessary can be acquired on the job and refined through in-service training--the more practice-oriented, the better. This assumption is promulgated most by teachers and administrators.

The concomitants and consequences of these widely-held assumptions are detrimental to both the development of a strong teaching profession and the attraction of large numbers of outstanding individuals to it. There being no university degree clearly marking the completion of a rigorous, sustained program of professional preparation, employers have no minimal criterion for screening and selecting. Possession of a master's degree on the part of a candidate can be a handicap if the salary schedule mandates higher pay. School boards frequently prefer that all beginning teachers in the district qualify only for the lowest pay scales on the schedule. There is no strong pressure from the field to upgrade the professional preparation of teachers--only to turn out better teachers within the existing restraints. Consequently, there has been no significant upgrading of the pre-service preparation of teachers in recent decades.

The price society pays for the assumption that the necessary preparation is best achieved on the job is substantial. We all admire uncles, aunts, cousins, brothers and sisters, or friends who acquire a graduate degree while teaching in the schools. Such an accomplishment usually means loss of evenings and vacations to studies--and considerable financial expense. Husbands or wives and children participate in the sacrifice. And, undoubtedly, so do hundreds of thousands of elementary and secondary school pupils. Their teacher/students simply cannot and do not have the time and energy to serve equally well the demands of family, graduate studies, and daily teaching. All suffer to some extent. It must be noted, also, that the additional degree attained is not necessarily directed toward improved teaching. Frequently, it is in administration or some specialty likely to take its recipient out of the classroom.

Law and medicine, to take two examples, announce with one degree both a profession and professional status for the recipient. Although both lawyers and physicians update themselves and specialize further while practicing, few of either group secure additional degrees. The time is come to upgrade the teaching profession by requiring for admission to practice the preparation we assume will come later--and awarding at the end of that preparation program the only degree required throughout a lifetime of teaching. It will then be necessary to devise criteria other than subsequent units of university credit in rewarding personal growth and excellence in teaching.

Now is the strategic time, when we have in general an adequate supply of teachers, to pay attention to matters of quality. Other

factors cause the time to be favorable. Interest in teaching historically has increased during periods of economic recession such as the present. Many young people not yet committed to a professional goal would be willing, I believe, to enter teacher education programs deliberately designed to be of highest quality. Although teachers have been in oversupply, there has been attrition in numbers preparing to teach and a continuing modest demand for applicants.

At this time, too, teacher education programs could be the beneficiaries of a substantial body of knowledge about human behavior and teaching produced in recent decades. Even though many teacher educators are inadequately prepared in this relevant knowledge, it now exists. There is a body of professional lore, sufficient to warrant extending the depth and breadth of the teacher education curriculum.

Qaulity and mass production are hard to reconcile. Consequently, I recommend proceeding selectively to improve the preparation of teachers. Specifically, I suggest that perhaps a dozen of the strongest university-based schools of education be freed, experimentally, to develop programs to include four years of general studies and two years of professional/clinical work leading to a master's degree in teaching. Approximately half of the professional portion would consist of internships on the faculties of local schools. These local schools, in turn, would be part of an intensive school improvement program. In effect, each unversity would join in a consortium with the best available schools for both educational improvement and teacher education.

Quality and mandated minimums also are hard to reconcile. Consequently, I recommend the release of these university-school collaborations from state credentialling requirements. Instead, teacher graduates would

be required to pass state licensing exams prior to employment in a school. Colleges of education would find it necessary to attract students on the basis of the recognized quality of their programs. The major professions separate the professional degree from the licensing process.

No major profession has grown up and flourished apart from the university. There are dangerous signs--too many to go into here--that the in-service education of teachers is drifting away from the University. There is grave danger that teaching will become a trade as a result. There is no question that the weakness of many colleges of education has contributed to this separation. But neither colleges of education nor teachers stand to benefit if it continues. The answer lies in a free, competitive market whereby universities are required to build the collaborative relationships suggested in order to be approved to educate teachers and schools are required to join with universities to assure the renewal of their own staffs and programs. Both sides of the collaboration benefit, then, from seeking out quality and endeavoring, together, to improve on that quality.

None of the foregoing is impossible. In fact, substantial progress could be made in a decade--the decade of the '80's. We appear to have been in a decade of negativism, with too much self-pity on the part of educators and too much criticism on the part of everyone else. The time is come to address our energies to these tasks of reconstruction.